
Into a new phase of the research on restructuring of work in the knowledge society: the Third WORKS General Assembly in Sofia (Bulgaria)

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The WORKS Project started two years ago (2005), involving the efforts of research institutes of 13 European countries with the main purpose of improving the understanding of the major changes in work in the knowledge-based society, taking account both of global forces and the regional diversity within Europe. While the first General Assemblies (Leuven and Chania, Greece) last year, aimed to develop a conceptual framework for studying the relationship between global forces and working, the third one took place in Sofia, Bulgaria from 19th to 21st September 2007. Around 40 European researchers attended it. This research meeting aimed to present synthetically the massive amount of data collected in the case studies (occupational and organisational) and with the quantitative research during last year. This meeting aimed also the preparations of next steps of the project.

The case studies in the organisational level were developed to research some crucial aspects of the project such as: the extend of globalisation on the sectors chosen for the study, the changes in the 'value chains', the use of ICT, the use of different forms of knowledge, the emergence and development of new forms of work organisation and the characteristics of the work force.

The research covered important business functions, like research and development function, design, manufacturing/production functions, logistics, business service provision and customer services. It was carried out in 13 different countries with a total of 58 different organisation case studies.

The conclusions vary according to the sectors and to the regions, and one can find some examples to illustrate it:

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- a) On R&D business function, the jobs still very attractive, specially due to good conditions of work and flexibility on work-life balance arrangements;
 - b) On the IT services for the public sector we can observe the increase of complexity in contract negotiations due to outsourcing and lengthening of the value chain. Power relations are related directly with the possession of knowledge;
 - c) On the production and logistics functions in the food sector the work organisation remains quite traditional and low skilled and we see the lengthening of value chain in the forms of takeovers our outsourcing of lower level work and simultaneous trends to centralisation, standardisation and specialisation.

The impact of the organisational changes and policies on the individuals was analysed with 31 occupational case studies distributed within 7 occupational groups (designers, researches, skilled and semi-skilled production workers, production workers in IT, front office employees and IT professionals) that are connected to the activities included in the organisational case studies mentioned above. The areas investigated were: work biographies, career construction, changes in occupational identities, quality of work, learning and skills development and work/life balance.

This individual approach allows to exceed the level of the organisations and to draw conclusions at the level of the occupational groups, as one can see in the following examples with some empirical results:

- a) In case of R&D workers one can observe that there is a high identification with the content of work, together with a high level of formal qualification and perspectives quite open. Due to organizational changes there we observe an increase of market-orientation that demands the diversity of the profile of workers, an establishment of new career paths and the increase of speeding up processes;
- b) The logistic is a business function under change and the principal effects of restructuring in the workers are: increase of knowledge-based activities, hierarchical and vertical differentiation, need of higher skill requirement due to technological progress in the field;
- c) About the production workers we can observe that globalisation and reorganisation of work have a direct influence on the work. Due to the general outsourcing and off shoring of the business function, there is a feeling of unstable working places and a high level of insecurity in employment. Changes mean in majority of cases, increase of intensity of work, long working hours, few opportunities of training and no significant changes in the content of work, there

is still a very low satisfaction with their jobs, low autonomy and repetitive tasks.

Looking at the future, next research tasks will include the production of thematic reports, a report on policies and institutions, leaning in both theoretical and empirical data collected and finally development of training material and dissemination activities.

The thematic reports will focus in the main themes of the project such as: global value chain restructuring, strategies to achieve flexibility in the workplace, change processes and future perspectives, new career trajectories, among others, with the purpose of characterise the work in knowledge society, general trends and possible future paths. The Portuguese research team (at IET) are the responsible partners for the report on change processes and future perspectives that will be produced in collaboration with University of Twente (Netherlands) and ITAS-FZK (Germany).